



# News Release

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## **STATE HEALTH OFFICIALS PARTNER WITH CELEBRITIES DEBBIE ALLEN AND PHYLCIA RASHAD TO PROMOTE BREAST CANCER AWARENESS**

SACRAMENTO -- Urging California women with limited resources to take advantage of free breast cancer screenings, California Health and Human Services Secretary Grantland Johnson and State Health Director Diana M. Bontá, R.N., Dr.P.H., today unveiled new breast cancer awareness public service announcements (PSAs) created and directed by actress, dancer and choreographer Debbie Allen and starring actress Phylicia Rashad, and renowned physician and health advocate Dr. Aliza Lifshitz in a Spanish-language version.

"Early detection of breast cancer is the key to saving lives," Johnson said. "Statistics show that if breast cancer is detected and treated early, the survival rate is more than 96 percent. We are very fortunate to have the support of the entertainment industry and three stars in their fields to help raise awareness of free breast cancer screening services."

The 30- and 15-second PSAs, part of the California Department of Health Services (CDHS) "Cancer Detection Programs: Every Woman Counts" campaign, deliver an emotional plea to women 40 and older to call California's toll-free telephone number (1-800-511-2300) to learn if they qualify for a free yearly clinical breast exam and mammogram. Incorporating dance, music and a diverse group of mothers, grandmothers and children, the announcements urge women to get screened for breast cancer so they won't "disappear" from their families and friends.

In the spot "Disappearing Act," Rashad, best known for her role as Claire Huxtable on *The Cosby Show*, warns women about breast cancer and encourages them to receive a free exam.

"Women are often so focused on their family's needs that they neglect their own," said Bontá. "With this compelling message, we hope to encourage women to get an annual screening for breast cancer to ensure that they will continue to be there for their loved ones."

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In 2003 alone, an estimated 22,000 women in California will be newly diagnosed with breast cancer, and 4,000 women will die from the disease. Early diagnosis and timely treatment of breast cancer have proven to be the most effective means of surviving the disease.

Since 1991, more than 650,000 women in California have been screened through CDHS cancer detection programs, which improve access to breast cancer screening services for low-income and uninsured women age 40 and older throughout California.

The announcements are scheduled to begin airing in June through member stations of the California Broadcasters Association.

In addition to the toll-free number, information is available in English, Spanish, Cantonese, Mandarin, Korean and Vietnamese. Information is also available at the CDHS Web site <http://www.dhs.ca.gov/cancerdetection>.